

Teacher Quality

Definition

Courses taught by highly qualified teachers is the number and percent of all courses requiring a highly qualified teacher that are taught by a teacher who meets the highly qualified criteria for the subject matter.

Data in context

All children benefit from qualified, talented teachers. Research shows that students who have high-quality teachers not only learn more, but they also see increased gains in achievement after several consecutive years of good teachers.¹ The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) places major emphasis on teacher quality as a significant factor in improving student achievement. Three essential criteria constitute the highly qualified standard: a bachelor's degree or beyond in the subject area taught, full state teacher certification, and demonstrated knowledge in the subjects taught.²

In practice, hiring high-quality teachers for all children proves to be an especially difficult challenge for low-performing schools to overcome. Low-performing schools have trouble retaining and recruiting good teachers because of possible sanctions as a result of federal and state accountability goals.³ Children in low-income families and children of color disproportionately attend low-performing schools and therefore have teachers with the least preparation and the weakest academic backgrounds, contributing to lower student performance.⁴

Due to a pay structure that rewards continued education, Kentucky outpaces the nation in its percentage of teachers with master's degrees or higher (70.6 percent in SY 2004, compared to 48.1 percent nationally), though research is inconclusive on the connection between advanced degrees and higher quality teaching.⁵ Kentucky ranked 9th among states in 2007 for policies that ensure accountability, incentives and capacity building to improve the



teaching profession.⁶ Kentucky is a leader on a number of measures, as one of four states that ban or cap the number of out-of-field teachers, and one of sixteen states that offer incentives to teachers working in targeted teaching assignments.⁷ However, Kentucky is one of 25 states that do not offer incentives to teachers working in targeted schools, which could help recruit high-quality teachers to low-performing schools.⁸

In Kentucky, the great majority of courses were taught by highly qualified teachers during SY 2008 (99 percent), an increase of six percentage points from SY 2004. Kentucky has notably narrowed the gap between schools in high-poverty areas and low-poverty areas (a difference of only 0.1 percentage points in SY 2008 compared to more than 3 percentage points in SY 2006).⁹

District rates vary for meeting the NCLB goal of having 100 percent of critical courses taught by highly qualified teachers. Over half of Kentucky districts (88 districts) reported that highly qualified teachers taught all of their courses during SY 2008. Another

50 districts reported that teachers failing to meet the designation taught only 1 or 2 percent of courses. In contrast, fewer than 90 percent of courses were taught by highly qualified teachers in Raceland Independent (82 percent) and Simpson County (89 percent) School Districts.

A number of districts demonstrated exemplary improvement in the percent of courses taught by highly qualified teachers between SY 2004 and SY 2008. Rates improved by at least 20 percentage points in Adair, Bath, Christian, Clinton, Fulton, Gallatin, Hardin, and Hart County School Districts. Ten districts posted a decrease in the percent of courses taught by highly qualified teachers.

Data Source: Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board.

Data Note: Independent school districts are listed after the school district for the county in which they are located.

Rate Calculation: (number of courses taught by a highly qualified teacher in SY 2004 * 100) / (total number of courses requiring a highly qualified teacher in SY 2004)
(number of courses taught by a highly qualified teacher in SY 2008 * 100) / (total number of courses requiring a highly qualified teacher in SY 2008)

- 1 Haskins, R., and Loeb, S. (2007). "A Plan to Improve the Quality of Teaching in American Schools." *The Future of Children*, a collaboration of The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and The Brookings Institution (Policy Brief). Available at <http://futureofchildren.org>. Accessed September 2008.
- 2 U.S. Department of Education (2006). *Highly Qualified Teachers for Every Child*. Available at <http://www.ed.gov>. Accessed September 2008.
- 3 Sunderman, G., and Kim J. (2005). *Teacher Quality: Equalizing Educational Opportunities and Outcomes*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- 4 Murnane, J., and Steele, J. (2007) "What is the Problem? The Challenge of Providing Effective Teachers for All Children." *Excellence in the Classroom*, vol. 17 no. 1.
- 5 Smith-Mello, M., Childress, M., Watts, A., Schirmer, M., and Dunavent, B. (2008). "Children at the Economic Margins Key to Sustaining Progress." *Foresight*, no. 51. Available at <http://www.kltpc.net>. Accessed August 2008.
- 6 Quality Counts 2008. (2008) "Kentucky – State Highlights 2008." *Education Week*. Available at <http://www.edweek.org>. Accessed September 2008.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Education Professional Standards Board. *2005-2006 Highly Qualified (HQ) Summary Report and 2007-2008 Highly Qualified (HQ) Summary Report*. Available at <http://www.kyepsb.net>. Accessed August 2008.

